

PROPOSAL FOR A FEDERAL DIRECTIVE TO SUPPORT THE
EMPOWERING NEPALI WOMEN INITIATIVE TO HELP ELIMINATE CHHAUPADI IN NEPAL
BY 2030 BY TRAINING MEN AND BOYS ABOUT GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL NORMS

by
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A capstone project submitted to Johns Hopkins University in conformity with the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Public Management

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Abstract

Chhaupadi is a religious practice based on centuries-old interpretations of Hinduism that regard menstrual blood to be impure, predominantly in the rural Western Provinces. Under Chhaupadi, women having their periods or who recently gave birth are banished to unsafe and unheated huts, animal shelters, or primitive forest dwellings until they are no longer bleeding. Chhaupadi has negative impacts on women's health and safety, promotes gender discrimination, increases their social ostracization, and raises concerns about human rights and social justice. Nepal's new Constitution has specific protections for women's health and equality, and the government is under increasing pressure to end this harmful practice for good. This memorandum to three key Nepal Ministries proposes to adopt, support, and implement a new government directive for a nine-year *Initiative* starting in 2021 (NCY 2078) to eliminate chhaupadi in Nepal by 2030 (NCY 2087). The *Empowering Nepali Women Initiative* is designed to educate and mentor men and boys about women's health and equality through hands-on training and active participation in incentive programs in their families, villages, and wider communities. The goal is to train, educate, monitor, and evaluate at least seventy-five percent of all men and boys in the four Western Provinces on gender equality and women's empowerment in six years, resulting in a fifty percent reduction in community practice of chhaupadi by 2030 (NCY 2087). The program model is based on successful male inclusion programs in twenty-two countries on gender equality, harmful gender norms, and family caregiving programs, and the primary beneficiaries are Nepali women, their families, and communities.

Keywords: Chhaupadi, menstruation, women's health, gender equality, Nepal

Capstone Advisors: Professors Paul Weinstein and Collin Paschall

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Hon. Parbat Gurung, Secretary, Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens
Hon. Prem Rai, Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs
Hon. Baikuntha Prasad Aryal, Secretary, Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology

FROM: Wayne Shields, Johns Hopkins University

RE: Proposal for a federal directive to support the *Empowering Nepali Women Initiative* to help eliminate chhaupadi by 2030 by training men and boys about gender equality and social norms

DATE: February 15, 2020

1. ACTION-FORCING EVENT

Sixteen Nepalese women and children have died from wildlife attacks, fires, and exposure to the elements while practicing chhaupadi in the past decade—four in 2019 alone and one in the past thirty days. Hundreds more have been injured, beaten, raped, or kidnapped for sex trafficking during the same period. These are only the reported incidents with a high probability that many more go unreported by rural villagers afraid of repercussions.^{1,2,3,4,5,6,7}

¹ *Chhaupadi and menstruation taboos*. ActionAid Nepal. Web site accessed on Feb 20, 2020, at <https://www.actionaid.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/womens-economic-empowerment/chhaupadi-and-menstruation-taboos>

² Sharma, B, Schultz, K (Jan 9, 2019). *Woman and 2 Children Die in Nepal Menstruation Hut*. NY Times. Accessed on Feb 15, 2020, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/09/world/asia/nepal-menstruation-taboo.html>

³ *Country reports on human rights practices: Nepal* (2018). US State Department, pp 22-23. Accessed on Mar 1, 2020, at <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/NEPAL-2018.pdf>

⁴ Press, D (Jul 10, 2017). *Banished to a 'menstrual shed,' a teen In Nepal is bitten by a snake and dies*. NPR. Accessed on Feb 20, 2020, at <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2017/07/10/536483652/banished-to-a-menstrual-shed-a-teen-in-nepal-is-bitten-by-a-snake-and-dies>

⁵ *Country reports on human rights practices: Nepal* (2018). US State Department, pp 22-23. Accessed on Mar 1, 2020, at <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/NEPAL-2018.pdf>

⁶ *Women's and Girls Rights* (Feb 2020). Human Rights Watch World Report 2020: Nepal. Accessed on Mar 1, 2020, at <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/nepal>

⁷ Singh, P (Jan 20, 2020). *No respite for women as 'chhaupadi' continues in tents*. Himalayan. Accessed on Mar 1, 2020, at <https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/no-respite-for-women-as-chhaupadi-continues-in-tents>

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Chhaupadi, also known as menstrual exile, is a religious practice based on centuries-old interpretations of Hinduism that regard menstrual blood to be impure. Under menstrual exile, women having their periods or who recently gave birth are banished to unsafe and unheated huts, animal shelters, or primitive forest dwellings until they are no longer bleeding.^{8,9}

Chhaupadi has negative impacts on women's health and safety, promotes gender discrimination, and increases their social ostracization.^{10,11} Its practice can lead to serious health conditions like malnourishment, infectious diseases, gynecologic complications, and the psychological impact on women who are considered "untouchable" during their periods. In addition to being physically and psychologically damaging to women and girls, chhaupadi creates barriers to public policy implementation and can complicate collaboration between Nepal's new federal, provincial, and municipal government branches.^{12,13} The chhaupadi-related

⁸ *Menstrual restrictions, including chhaupadi* (Jan 2020). United Nations Nepal, pp 19-23. Accessed on Mar 1, 2020, at http://un.org.np/sites/default/files/desk_review_final.pdf

⁹ Lama, D, Kamaraj R (2015). *Maternal and child health care in chhaupadi pratha: social seclusion of mother and child after delivery in Achham, Nepal*. Public Health Research Series, SRM University, V4, pp 21-33. Accessed on Feb 15, 2020, at https://webstor.srmist.edu.in/web_assets/srm_mainsite/files/2016/vol_4_public_health_research_series_652015.pdf#page=22

¹⁰ Karki, TB, Kalpana, K (Dec 31, 2019). *False Belief and Harmful Cultural Practices of Chhaupadi System in Nepal*. Nepal Journal of Multidisciplinary Research, v2(3), pp19-24. Accessed on Mar 20, 2020, at <https://www.nepjol.info/index.php/njmr/article/view/26971>

¹¹ Thapa, SK, Acharya, S, Acharya, K (Jan 7, 2017). *Chhaupadi: banishment culture in rural Nepal with serious health consequences*. International Annals of Medicine. v1(5). Accessed on Feb 21, 2020, at https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/8854/d17d4a17d189933074caf93c25972b0d4df9.pdf?_ga=2.1434673.1468078833.1596993637-1238694043.1594678758

¹² Morrison, J, Basnet, M, Bhatt, A, Khimbanjar, S, Chaulagain, S, Sah, N, Baral, S, Mahon, T, Hodgkin, M (Dec 2018). *Girls' Menstrual Management in Five Districts of Nepal: Implications for Policy and Practice*. Studies in Social Justice. Vol 12/2, pp 251-272. Accessed on Mar 1, 2020, at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330011714_Girls'_Menstrual_Management_in_Five_Districts_of_Nepal_Implications_for_Policy_and_Practice

¹³ *UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030: Nepal self-assessment* (2020). UN Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform. Accessed on June 25, 2020, at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/memberstates/nepal>

deaths and health problems of these women have recently received major national and international media attention. Nepal's new Constitution has specific protections for women's health and rights, setting high standards for women's empowerment, but the government is under increasing pressure from health professionals, community groups, civil society organizations, and concerned citizens to end this harmful practice for good.^{14,15,16}

Scope of the problem

Experts attribute the widespread practice of chhaupadi in Nepal to long-held Hindu religious and cultural beliefs, and, in the west, to geographic isolation, poverty, low literacy levels, and gender disparities that are grounded in a traditional, patriarchal society.^{17,18} A 2015 study of young women in two Western districts found that three out of four of them reported participating in chhaupadi, and forty-three percent of those women experienced some negative consequence such as injury, sickness, or depression. Two other studies reported similar results: one in 2015 found that seventy-one percent of women in the west participated in chhaupadi, and another study in 2018 reported seventy-two percent participation.^{19,20}

¹⁴ *Constitution of Nepal*. Web site last updated Sep 30, 2019. Nepal Law Commission. Accessed on April 3, 2020, at <http://www.lawcommission.gov.np/en/archives/category/documents/prevailing-law/constitution/constitution-of-nepal>

¹⁵ Editors (Dec 26, 2019). *Fight against chhaupadi*. Rising Nepal. Accessed on Feb 12, 2020, at <https://risingnepaldaily.com/editorial/fight-against-chhaupadi>

¹⁶ Rathmore, H (Dec 6, 2019). *Women in Nepal face 40 restrictions during periods*. The Diplomat. Accessed on Mar 1, 2020, at <https://thediplomat.com/2019/12/women-in-nepal-face-40-restrictions-during-periods>

¹⁷ Preiss, D (May 13, 2019). *Why it's so hard to stop women from sleeping in a menstrual shed*. NPR. Accessed on Feb 12, 2020, at <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2019/05/13/721450261/why-its-so-hard-to-stop-women-from-sleeping-in-a-menstrual-shed>

¹⁸ Cousins, S (Jan 6, 2019). *In Nepal, tradition is killing women*. Foreign Policy. Accessed on Feb 29, 2020, at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/01/06/in-nepal-tradition-is-killing-women-chhaupadi-womens-rights-menstruation>

¹⁹ Amatya P, Ghimire S, Callahan KE, Baral BK, Poudel K (Dec 1, 2018). *Practice and lived experience of menstrual exiles (chhaupadi) among adolescent girls in far-western Nepal*. PLoS One, 13(12): e0208260. Accessed on Mar 1, 2020, at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6287853/pdf/pone.0208260.pdf>

²⁰ *Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey* (2015), Ibid.

The western provinces experience the most extreme version of chhaupadi, but it occurs to a lesser extent and in varying degrees of severity in all Nepalese Provinces.²¹ One in ten women in Middle, Eastern, and Southern Nepal report participating in chhaupadi, for example, but their levels and types of participation vary in intensity, often featuring confinement to separate rooms, not being allowed to touch water taps or to cook, or having to avoid places of worship.^{22,23}

There is growing evidence that chhaupadi is a human rights and social justice problem.²⁴ Kadariya and Aro wrote in their 2015 analysis of the ethical aspects of menstrual exile that, “[Chhaupadi] has been criticized for violation of basic human rights of women.”²⁵ Alejos, in her 2015 study report, describes it as “. . . a serious human rights violation affecting females in rural areas in Far West Nepal districts,” and Rathmore attributes at least forty human rights violations to chhaupadi.^{26,27} Many civil society organizations, human rights groups, and social scientists regard chhaupadi as a form of gender-based violence (GBV) as well, defined by the European Commission as “...violence directed against a person because of that person's gender or violence

²¹ Morrison, J, et al (2018), Ibid.

²² Alejos, SC (Jul 2015). *Abolition of chhaupadi in Nepal: baseline report*. Restless development Nepal. Accessed on Feb 20, 2020, at <https://restlessdevelopment.org/file/abolition-of-chhaupadi-in-nepal-baseline-report-pdf>

²³ Editors (Feb 14, 2019). *That time of the month*. Nepali Times. Accessed on Mar 1, 2020, at <https://www.nepalitimes.com/editorial/that-time-of-the-month>

²⁴ *Menstrual restrictions, including chhaupadi* (Jan 2020), Ibid.

²⁵ Kadariya, S, Aro, AR (2015). *Chhaupadi practice in Nepal—analysis of ethical aspects*. *Medicolegal Bioethics*, pp 53–58. Accessed on Mar 1, 2020 at <https://www.dovepress.com/chhaupadi-practice-in-nepal-ndash-analysis-of-ethical-aspects-peer-reviewed-article-MB>

²⁶ Alejos, SC (Jul 2015), Ibid.

²⁷ Rathmore, H (Dec 6, 2019). *Women in Nepal Face 40 Restrictions During Periods*. The Diplomat. Accessed on Mar 1, 2020, at <https://thediplomat.com/2019/12/women-in-nepal-face-40-restrictions-during-periods>

that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately, including, physical, sexual, psychological, or economic harm, or suffering to women.”²⁸

Health and safety

Exiled women face significant health and safety problems, including physical and psychological harm, illness, assault, and death.^{29,30} For example, a 2015 study of 672 women of menstrual age in Western Nepal concluded that chhaupadi was associated with reproductive health problems, and is, “... a major threat for women’s health.”³¹ The United Nations raised the alarm about problems with menstrual exile almost a decade ago when it published a field guide for its Nepal-based health care and program staff, citing instances of harm to women and girls. Health concerns they identified included diarrhea, pneumonia, dehydration, hypothermia, and reproductive and urinary tract infections.³²

Kadariya and Aro studied harmful psychosocial impacts of chhaupadi and cite the negative psychological impacts of realistic fears of sexual abuse, assault, and attacks from wild

²⁸ What is gender-based violence? European Commission. Web site accessed on 6/30/2020 at https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-based-violence/what-gender-based-violence_en

²⁹ Adhikari, R (Feb 14, 2020). *Bringing an end to deadly “menstrual huts” is proving difficult in Nepal*. British Medical Journal, 368/m536. Accessed on Mar 20, 2020 at <https://www.bmj.com/content/368/bmj.m536.full>

³⁰ *Menstruating women are still being banished to outdoor sheds and it’s killing them* (Feb 2, 2020). Kathmandu Post. <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2019/02/22/menstruating-women-are-still-being-banished-to-outdoor-shedsand-its-killing-them>

³¹ Ranabhat, C, Kim, C, Choi, E, Aryal, A, Park, M, Doh, Y (Aug 27, 2015). *Chhaupadi culture and reproductive health of women in Nepal*. Asia Pacific Journal of Public Health. Accessed on Feb 25, 2020 at <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1010539515602743>

³² *Field Bulletin: Chhaupadi in the Far-West* (Apr 2011). United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator’s Office, Office of Human Rights. Accessed on Feb 15, 2020, at https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Water/ContributionsStigma/others/field_bulletin_-_issue1_april_2011_-_chhaupadi_in_far-west.pdf

Characteristics of chhaupadi practice		
	Freq.	%
Living space during menstruation		
Chhau shed	3	3.9
Livestock shed	63	81.8
Courtyard	11	14.3
Eating space during menstruation		
Place stayed during menstruation	29	37.7
Outside home	48	62.3
Place of excretion during menstruation		
Temporary toilet	25	32.5
Open place	52	67.5
Food prohibited during menstruation		
Milk and milk products	75	97.4
Fruits and vegetables	2	2.6
Frequency of bath during menstrual cycle		
Once	54	70.1
2–3 times	12	15.6
More than 3 times	11	14.3
Material used to absorb menstrual blood		
Homemade pad	8	10.4
Clothes	69	89.6
Frequency of changing pad or cloths		
Every 6 hours	41	53.3
Less than 6 hours	9	11.7
More than 6 hours	27	35.1
Place for drying washed clothes		
Outside home in sunlight	75	97.4
Inside the living spaces	2	2.6

Amatya P, et al (2018).

Table 1

snakes, jackals, and other wildlife. They observed that women and girls in the menstrual exile study are subject to “. . .social isolation, depression, low self-esteem, and disempowerment.”³³

Discrimination

Women who practice chhaupadi experience discrimination in many forms, most severely in the western provinces. Basic restrictions include being forbidden from touching people, using the same water sources as other people, or entering the house or kitchen.³⁴ **Table 1** (this page) provides a breakdown of some specific discriminatory restrictions experienced by the respondents who were measured in Amatya’s study. Another 2018 study of 900 women in four Western Nepalese districts reported similar results.³⁵

³³ Kadariya, S, Aro, AR (2015), Ibid.

³⁴ *Menstrual restrictions, including chhaupadi* (Jan 2020), Ibid.

³⁵ Morrison, J, et al (2018), Ibid.

Ostracization and low social status

The social customs enforcing menstruation taboos ostracize women in their communities and exacerbate gender-based violence from their husbands and other male family members.

According to the 2011 UN Field Bulletin, women are, “. . . barred from participating in family and community level cultural and religious activities,” when menstruating or shortly after birth.^{36,37}

Chhaupadi practice and the resulting isolation of women is promoted and reinforced by their husbands, children, mothers, mothers-in law, village elders, and the women themselves. For example, one Western Nepali village leader in a 2015 qualitative study of maternal and child health care stated that, “. . . if [women] move freely they might contaminate things and gods will be angry and show fury by letting evil things to happen.”^{38,39} Further, Nepal’s patriarchal society reinforces women’s subservience to men—especially in marriage—resulting in their further ostracization and disempowerment.⁴⁰ Ghimire, in a 2013 national briefing on the status of women in Nepal, reported that, “Social norms in Nepal historically condone control of female sexuality and girls’ and women’s normative subservient role in the household.” According to Ghimire, “Poor, marginalized, and low caste women and girls occupy weak social, economic, and political positions in Nepali society.”⁴¹

³⁶ *Field Bulletin: Chhaupadi in the far-west (Apr 2011)*, *Ibid*.

³⁷ Lama, D, Kamaraj R (2015), *Ibid*.

³⁸ Sewa Bhattarai, S (Feb 15, 2019). *Communicating to remove menstrual taboo*. Nepali Times. Accessed on Mar 1, 2020, at <https://www.nepalitimes.com/banner/communicating-to-remove-menstrual-taboo>

³⁹ Lama, D, Kamaraj R (2015), *Ibid*.

⁴⁰ Kiss, L, Davis, A, Fotheringham, D, McAlpine, A, Kyegombe, N, Abilia, L, Mak, J (2019). *The trafficking of girls and young women in Nepal: evidence for prevention and assistance*. Plan International, UN Migration, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. Accessed on June 30, 2020 at <https://plan-uk.org/file/plan-trafficking-report-nepal-v3pdf/download?token=TkBnPx5O>

⁴¹ Samuels, F, Ghimire, A (2013). *Social Norms for Adolescent Girls in Nepal: Slow but Positive Progress*. Country Briefing. London: Overseas Development Institute, National Center for Contemporary Research. Accessed on July 3, 2020, at <http://www.nccr.org.np/uploads/publication/cebc00888243d75ed0776e1123151e17.pdf>

Lack of education or access to information

Lack of information about menstruation and sociocultural barriers to knowledge can lead women and girls in Nepal to believe misconceptions about their monthly periods. For example, Radha Paudel, a reproductive health nurse and advocate for eliminating chhaupadi, states that, “...many rural women in Nepal do not even know about panties and pads, they bleed freely all day, and in many households, women take turns using the same rags.”^{42,43} In a 2018 study of schoolgirls in five Western districts, seventy-two percent of girls concealed drying menstrual cloths to prevent bringing shame on their family.⁴⁴

Many women resist complying with Nepal’s anti-chhaupadi laws and practice menstrual exile even when they know it is illegal.⁴⁵ For example, Alejos theorized that religious beliefs drive women’s support for the practice, and tested it in a 2015 study in Western Nepal. She found that most women in her study agreed with false statements such as, “Menstruation is not a natural process,” and, “Menstruation is a sign of impurity.” She also found that communities in Western Nepal had generally positive impressions of chhaupadi. One female respondent stated that, “. . .the community cannot go against rituals and traditions that are being followed by their ancestors.” Another said, “...we can say no to anyone but cannot say no to almighty...He is all in all...We cannot dare to refuse.”⁴⁶

⁴² Editors (Feb 14, 2019). *That time of the month*. Nepali Times. Accessed on Mar 1, 2020, at <https://www.nepalitimes.com/editorial/that-time-of-the-month>

⁴³ Sewa Bhattarai, S (Feb 15, 2019), Ibid.

⁴⁴ Morrison, J, et al (2018), Ibid.

⁴⁵ Preiss, D (May 13, 2019)., Ibid.

⁴⁶ Alejos, SC (July 2015), Ibid.

Finally, according to a 2015 report from Nepal's Central Bureau of Statistics, women's low education levels are associated with discriminatory practices.⁴⁷ Women have much lower secondary school completion rates than men, and are often discouraged from attending school at an early age in poor, rural communities. This situation compounds the isolation of women because they are far less likely than men to be employed, are paid much less than men if they are working and work longer hours than men, and are commonly relegated to lower caste and traditionally female roles like fetching water, milking cows and goats, and growing small "house gardens" for family consumption.⁴⁸ As recently as last month, UN Nepal reported that harmful practices associated with chhaupadi are still common and need to be addressed to meet Nepal's goal for women's equality.⁴⁹

3. HISTORY

The challenge for Nepal's new government has been the difficulty translating anti-chhaupadi laws and regulations into any significant behavior change on the ground. There are two likely explanations for this problem: First, due to its long history as a poor nation, its entrenched religious traditions and patriarchal culture, and the wide dispersion of most of its citizens in remote villages, Nepalese society is highly resistant to change. Second, due to the young age of the new government and its Constitution, the current lag in establishing laws and regulations to support it, and confusion among agencies and NGOs, the translation of official policies and

⁴⁷ *Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2014, Final Report* (2015). Central Bureau of Statistics, Kathmandu, Nepal: Central Bureau of Statistics and UNICEF Nepal, pp 151-152. Accessed on Feb 22, 2020, at <https://www.unicef.org/nepal/media/486/file>

⁴⁸ *Ratio of female to male lower secondary completion rate in Nepal*. World Bank Gender Data Portal. Accessed on March 1, 2020, at <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/gender/country/nepal>

⁴⁹ *Menstrual restrictions, including chhaupadi* (Jan 2020), Ibid.

regulations into practice has so far been unsuccessful.^{50,51} For example, in 2018, dozens of municipal governments across the country instituted a regulation banning access to food subsistence programs to villagers who practice chhaupadi, requiring proof of the destruction of

Pivotal moments impacting chhaupadi-related policies and programs

- **2005:** *Supreme court outlaws chhaupadi*
- **2008:** *Nepal becomes a new Federal Democratic Republic*
- **2008:** *Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Welfare issues guidelines outlawing chhaupadi*
- **2016:** *20 regional CSOs sign Dhangadi Declaration with seven-point commitment against GBV*
- **2017:** *Citizens ratify new Constitution*
- **2019:** *Three federal ministries commit to developing a joint plan of action by the end of 2020*

menstrual huts to enroll. A few villages reported up to a twenty percent reduction in the numbers of huts, but most reported no significant change.⁵²

The new government has its peoples' support, who voted by a wide margin to ratify the new Constitution in 2017. Many agree with ending chhaupadi as well, but resistance to change is strong, especially in the rural districts. Although domestic efforts by national and local governments and civil society organizations (CSOs) have failed to stem the practice of menstrual

⁵⁰ Preiss, D (May 13, 2019) Ibid.

⁵¹ Adhikari, R (Feb 14, 2020), Ibid.

⁵² Adhikari, R (Jan 14, 2019). *Destroy period huts or forget state support: Nepal moves to end the practice of chhaupadi*. The Guardian. Accessed on Mar 15, 2020, at <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/jan/14/destroy-period-huts-or-forget-state-support-nepal-moves-to-end-practice-chhaupadi>

exile, one recent government effort has raised the stakes for chhaupadi practitioners.^{53,54,55}

The Ministry of Human Affairs coordinated the first-ever arrest for violating anti-chhaupadi laws on December 19, 2019.⁵⁶ This accomplishment built on the Supreme Court's decision against chhaupadi in 2005 and the national anti-chhaupadi law enacted unanimously by Parliament in 2017 (please see *Pivotal Moments list*, page 10).^{57,58,59} The result has been a surge in media coverage and public awareness, but the longer-term impact of this action is yet to be seen.

Nepal's new Constitution, drafted in 2015 and ratified in 2017, includes clear requirements for gender equality and reducing gender-based violence in articles 29, 38, and 39.^{60,61} In a notable step, Nepal's Ministry of Physical Infrastructure worked with national and regional stakeholders to develop a framework for *Gender Equality and Social Inclusion* (GESI) in 2017, which provides needed guidance and consistency to public and private women's empowerment program implementers.⁶² Nepal was also recognized for its twenty percent increase in women's economic participation and opportunity since 2006 in the *Global Economic*

⁵³ Amatya P et al (Dec 1, 2018), Ibid.

⁵⁴ Editors (Feb 2, 2020). *Menstruating women are still being banished to outdoor sheds and it's killing them*. Kathmandu Post. Accessed on Mar 1, 2020, at <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2019/02/22/menstruating-women-are-still-being-banished-to-outdoor-shedsand-its-killing-them>

⁵⁵ Adhikari, R (Jan 14, 2019) Ibid.

⁵⁶ *Nepal makes first arrest over chhaupadi menstrual hut death: The custom remains prevalent in Nepal's remote west where some communities fear misfortune, such as a natural disaster* (Dec 6, 2019). Sky News. Accessed on Feb 15, 2020, at <https://news.sky.com/story/nepal-makes-first-arrest-over-chhaupadi-menstrual-hut-death-11880105>

⁵⁷ Sedhai, R (Aug 10, 2017). *Nepal passes law to end practice of exiling women for menstruating*. Independent. Accessed on Feb 15, 2020, at <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/nepal-womens-rights-menstruation-exile-law-bill-chhaupadi-acid-attacks-hindu-customs-dowry-a7885861.html>

⁵⁸ *New law criminalises chhaupadi custom* (Aug 10, 2017). Kathmandu Post. Accessed on 2/15/2020 at <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2017/08/10/new-law-criminalises-chhaupadi-custom>

⁵⁹ Editors (Dec 26, 2019). *Fight against chhaupadi*. Rising Nepal. Accessed on Feb 12, 2020, at <https://risingnepaldaily.com/editorial/fight-against-chhaupadi>

⁶⁰ *Nepal's 2015 Constitution—English translation* (Aug 2019), Ibid.

⁶¹ *Constitution of Nepal*. Web site last updated September 30, 2019, Ibid.

⁶² *A Common Framework for Gender Equality and Social Inclusion* (2017). Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Working Group, International Development Partners Group, Nepal. Accessed on Jan 27, 2020, at: https://www.undp.org/content/dam/nepal/docs/generic/GESI%20framework%20Report_Final_2017.pdf

Forum's January 2020 report.⁶³ Unfortunately, Nepal has come up short on other women's empowerment measures such as ending discrimination and violence against women.^{64,65}

UN Sustainable Development Goal for Women's Equality

Nepal's government made a firm commitment to *Sustainable Development Goal Five* (SDG5), one of seventeen goals that emerged from the 2012 *United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development* in Rio de Janeiro (please see **Three relevant SDG5 targets list, below**). The adoption of SDG5 was driven by the United Nations Development Programme and UN Women to address global concerns about human rights and justice, and political, environmental, and economic challenges in all countries.⁶⁶ Nepal has embedded language in its three-year-old

Three relevant SDG5 targets for attaining gender equality in Nepal by 2030

- *End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.*
- *Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early, and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.*
- *Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.*

Constitution that supports SDG5, with specific remedies to help achieve it. For example, the Constitution mandates that every committee or council for all three tiers of government must have at least 33% representation by women and at least one female member on each executive

⁶³ *Global Gender Gap 2020* (2020). World Economic Forum, pp 261-262. Geneva. Accessed on Feb 15, 2020, at http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf

⁶⁴ *Country reports on human rights practices: Nepal* (2018). US State Department, pp 22-23. Accessed on Mar 1, 2020, at <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/NEPAL-2018.pdf>

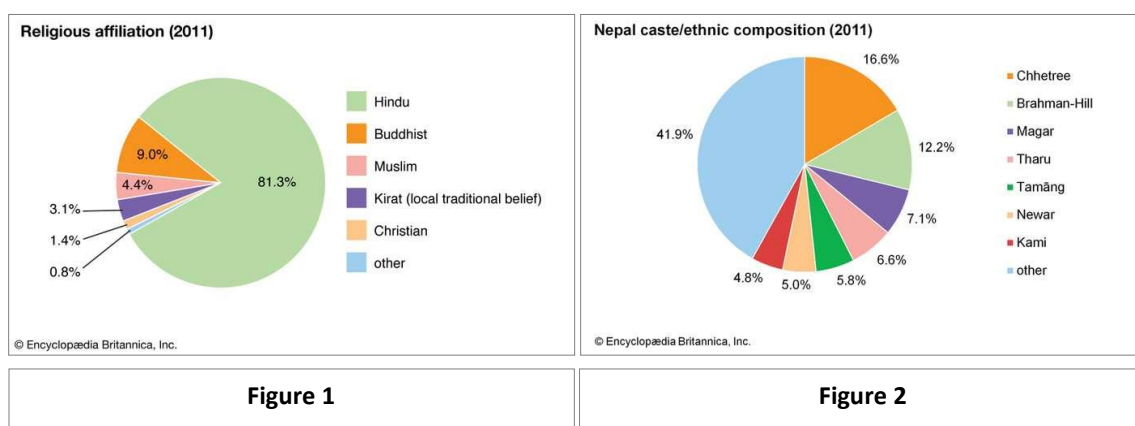
⁶⁵ *Women's and Girls Rights* (2020). World Report 2020: Nepal. Human Rights Watch. Accessed on Mar 1, 2020 at <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/nepal>

⁶⁶ *Sustainable Development Goal number five (SDG5): Women's equality by 2030* (2015). United Nations Development Program. Accessed on Jan 31, 2020, at <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs/sdg-5-gender-equality>

committee.⁶⁷ In its 2020 self-analysis of Nepal’s progress reaching SDG5 2030 goals, the government reported that their primary obstacle to success arose from the need to better coordinate and communicate between government ministries and civil society, public and private partners, and the public.⁶⁸

Entrenched beliefs

Societal traditions are difficult to change and the practice of chhaupadi is especially persistent, despite the government’s best efforts to eliminate it.^{69,70} Nepal is a culturally pluralistic and devoutly religious country, and Hinduism is the dominant practice. In Nepal’s 2011 census—the most recent one taken—more than four out of five Nepali people identified as Hindu, followed by Buddhist at 9%, Muslim at 4%, and at least a dozen other religious affiliations in the remaining 5% (please see **Figure 1, below**).^{71,72}



⁶⁷ *Nepal’s 2015 Constitution—English translation* (Aug 2019). Constitute Project. Accessed on Feb 3, 2020, at https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Nepal_2015.pdf

⁶⁸ *UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030: Nepal self-assessment*. 2020. UN Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform. Accessed on June 25, 2020, at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/memberstates/nepal>

⁶⁹ Rojita Adhikari, R (Feb 14, 2020), Ibid.

⁷⁰ Cousins, S (Jan 6, 2019), Ibid.

⁷¹ Nepal: religious affiliation (image). Encyclopædia Britannica website, Encyclopædia Britannica, Edinburgh. Accessed on Feb 15, 2020, at <https://www.britannica.com/place/Nepal/The-people#/media/1/409152/209448>

⁷² *Nepal 2019 international religious freedom report* (May 2019). US Department of State, Office of International Religious Freedom. <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/NEPAL-2019-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>

Society in Nepal is also culturally divided by a well-established caste system similar to India's, where higher-ranked caste members are held in better regard and receive more privileges than those below them (please see **Figure 2, page 13**).⁷³ Poorer, more rural areas tend to have more low-caste populations than urban areas, and their residents are more likely to participate in chhaupadi than in urban centers like Kathmandu. Religious tradition and the caste system make changing cultural norms about harmful practices like chhaupadi challenging.

Key individuals, organizations, and agencies

The 2015 law making chhaupadi illegal is widely supported in Nepal at all levels of government and by many national and local NGOs, INGOs, and multilateral institutions.⁷⁴ Some government officials, thought leaders, and organizations helped ensure that anti-chhaupadi language and support for SDG5 were inserted into the 2017 Constitution. Most are actively involved in working to eliminate chhaupadi by 2030 and are led by women including, for example, [Indira Yunes](#), President and Founder of Care Women Nepal from Karnali (Region 6), and Sheela Sapkhota, who is a Sexual and Reproductive Health Specialist for the Tuki Association through CARE Nepal. [Radha Paudel](#), is CEO and Founder of the Radha Paudel Foundation, and is a prominent Nepali leader in chhaupadi awareness and elimination. Here is a sampling of more key agencies and civil society organizations:

Government Ministries and Agencies

Government support for eliminating chhaupadi comes from the top tiers of the federal, provincial, and municipal governments: Hon. [Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli](#) and Hon.

⁷³ Nepal: Ethnic composition (image). Encyclopædia Britannica website, Encyclopædia Britannica, Edinburgh. Accessed on Feb 15, 2020, at <https://www.britannica.com/place/Nepal/The-people#/media/1/409152/237039>

⁷⁴ Alejos, SC (Jul 2015), Ibid.

[President Bidhya Devi Bhandari](#) (formerly secretary of the Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport), are both proponents, as are the seven provincial and most municipal government leaders like Hon. Gauri Kumari Oli, elected parliamentarian from Sudurpashchim (Province 7), and Hon. Nawaraj Rawat, State Minister of Health and Population.⁷⁵ Three Ministers are coordinating the development of a *National plan of action to eliminate chhaupadi by 2030*: Hon. Parbat Gurung of the Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens; Hon. Prem Rai of the Ministry of Home Affairs; and Hon. Baikuntha Prasad Aryal of the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology.^{76,77}

Other Nepali thought leaders who advocate for gender equality and banning chhaupadi include Renu Sharma, co-founder and president of the Women's Foundation Nepal; Sushila Karki, Chief Justice, Supreme Court, Nepal (2016-2017), who works on chhaupadi law enforcement; Samjhana Pokhreo, chairperson for the NGO Jagaran Nepal, that advocates for human rights and equalizing women's participation in society; and Mohna Ansari, Nepal Human Rights Commissioner, who champions gender equality policies.^{78,79,80}

⁷⁵ *Nepal criminalizes centuries-old tradition of chhaupadi for women* (Oct 17, 2017). DW. Accessed on Feb 20, 2020, at <https://www.dw.com/en/nepal-criminalizes-centuries-old-hindu-tradition-of-chhaupadi-for-women/a-40035024>

⁷⁶ *National Council of Ministers*. Web site accessed on May 15, 2020, at <https://www.opmcm.gov.np/en/cabinet>

⁷⁷ Preiss, D (May 13, 2019), *Ibid*.

⁷⁸ *Challenges of menstruation*. The Women's Foundation Nepal. Web page accessed on June 20, 2020, at <https://www.womenepal.org/womens-and-childrens-issues/chhaupadi>

⁷⁹ *Profile: The Right Honorable Chief Justice*. Supreme Court, Nepal. Web page accessed on July 3, 2020, at http://supremecourt.gov.np/pages/cv_justices/cv_sushilakarki.html

⁸⁰ *Samjhana Pokhreo, Chairperson*. Jagaran Nepal for Women's Rights, Peace, and Governance. Web page accessed on Jul 3, 2020, at http://www.jagarnepal.org/index.php?route=cms/article&menu_id=69

National Non-Profit Organizations (NGOs)

Action Aid Nepal

Policy position

Action Aid Nepal supports strengthening women's empowerment, improving safety and security of women and girls, and advancing women's productive roles.

Programs

Western Nepal Chhaupadi Action Team: Local government workers, including police, health assistants, and others work with ActionAid in Western Nepal to help end chhaupadi and educate their communities.

Western Nepal Women's "Reflect Circles": Dozens of Western Nepalese community women's groups meet regularly to discuss the impacts of chhaupadi and brainstorm about solutions to the problem.⁸¹

The Advocacy Project

Policy position

The Advocacy Project supports marginalized communities and small NGOs in their efforts to reduce violence and gender inequality, and government policies and regulations that help accomplish their goals like Nepal's anti-chhaupadi law.

Programs

Peace Fellowship Program: Selects and supports young Peace Fellows each year on advocacy projects to improve the quality of life in marginalized communities.

Centre for Agro-Ecology and Development (CAED) Partnership: Exposes and helps prevent threats to the reproductive health of marginalized Nepali women and girls.^{82,83}

⁸¹ *ActionAid Nepal: Policy and research.* ActionAid. Web site accessed on Jun 15, 2020, at <https://www.actionaid.org.uk/about-us/policy-and-research>

⁸² *End menstrual banishment in Nepal* (2019). The Advocacy Project. Accessed on Feb 28, 2020, at <https://www.advocacynet.org/fellowship-5-caed>

⁸³ *Peace Fellows, 2003 – 2020.* The Advocacy Project. Web page accessed on March 15, 2020, at <https://www.advocacynet.org/fellowship-5-caed>

International Non-profit Organizations and Multilateral Institutions

UNICEF Nepal/UNICEF

Policy position

UNICEF Supports policies that promote gender equality for boys and girls in Nepal.

Programs

Menstrual Hygiene Management Program: School-based program for girls and female teachers that helps reduce stigma and marginalization about menstruation with accurate information, advice, and support.

UN Women Nepal/UN Women

Policy position

UN Women supports breaking the stigma of menstruation in Nepal, and supports laws, regulations, and programs that help reduce chhaupadi and other harmful practices.⁸⁴

Programs

Male Involvement: Training curriculum on gender equality and harmful gender roles for men.

Restless Development Nepal/Restless Development

Policy position

Restless Development supports policies that empower young people to change their lives and the lives of people in their communities, and they support the abolition of chhaupadi in the far and mid-western region of Nepal.

Programs

Harmful Social Norms Program: Supports young people in ten marginalized communities to counter harmful social norms and practices in sexual health and gender equality.

Youth Partners Coalition: Collaborating partner for forty local and national youth organizations focusing on youth participation in policy development on sexual health and safety.

Sexual Rights Program: Works in four mid- and far-west regions of Nepal to counter chhaupadi by increasing awareness and support for its abolition among community leaders,

⁸⁴ UN Women (Apr 6, 2017). *Abolishing chhaupadi, breaking the stigma of menstruation in rural Nepal*. Accessed on Feb 20, 2020, at <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2017/4/feature-abolishing-chhaupadi-breaking-the-stigma-of-menstruation-in-rural-nepal>

empowering young people, and strengthening local organizations and government to take action on chhaupadi.^{85,86,87}

4. POLICY PROPOSAL: *THE EMPOWERING NEPALI WOMEN INITIATIVE*

This proposal is to adopt, support, and implement a new government directive for a nine-year initiative starting in 2021 (Nepali Calendar Year 2078) to eliminate chhaupadi in Nepal by 2030 (NCY 2087). This effort, called the *Empowering Nepali Women Initiative*, is designed to educate and mentor men and boys about women's health and equality through hands-on training, mentoring, and active participation in incentive programs in their families, villages, and other communities in the four Western Provinces of Gandaki (Province 4), Province 5, Karnali (Province 6), and Sudurpashchim (Province 7).

The *Empowering Nepali Women Initiative* calls for the Federal government to adopt a new directive supporting its inclusion in the *National plan of action to eliminate gender-based violence*, currently being revised by the Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens, in association with the Ministry of Home Affairs, and the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology.^{88,89} This directive would include at least four elements: (1) financial and regulatory support for community driven male involvement initiatives in high-incidence rural villages and communities for nine years, including a cost-benefit analysis in the first year, (2) strong incentives for compliance with Nepal's 2017 anti-chhaupadi law, (3) consistently enforced

⁸⁵ *Abolish Chhaupadi practices in mid far west provinces of Nepal*. Restless Development Nepal. Web page accessed on Feb 20, 2020, at <https://restlessdevelopment.org/abolish-chhaupadi-practices-in-mid-and-far-west-of-nepal>

⁸⁶ *Restless Development Nepal: Program portfolio 2017/2018*. Web site accessed on Jun 30, 2020, at <https://restlessdevelopment.org/file/nepal-programme-brief-copy-pdf>

⁸⁷ Alejos, SC (Jul 2015), Ibid.

⁸⁸ *National plan of action for year against gender-based violence: Nepal* (2010). UN Women website. Accessed on Mar 15, 2020, at <https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/en/countries/asia/nepal/2010/national-plan-of-action-for-year-against-gender-based-violence>

⁸⁹ *Abolish Chhaupadi practices in mid far west provinces of Nepal*. Restless Development Nepal. Accessed on Feb 20, 2020, at <https://restlessdevelopment.org/abolish-chhaupadi-practices-in-mid-and-far-west-of-nepal>

government penalties for individual and community violators, and (4) guidelines for cooperation between the Federal, Provincial, and Municipal governments and the public and private sectors to develop, implement, and evaluate the *Initiative*.

The goal for this policy project is to train, educate, monitor, and evaluate at least seventy-five percent of all men and boys in the four Western Provinces on gender equality and women's empowerment in six years, resulting in a fifty percent reduction in community practice of chhaupadi by 2030 (NCY 2087). The strategy is to intensify the efforts of men and boys to work within their families and communities to reach Nepal's gender equality and women's empowerment goals, as detailed in the *UNDP's Sustainable Development Goals for Gender Equality in 2030*, the 2015 *Dhangadi Declaration for Women's Equality*, and the Constitution.^{90,91,92} This evidence-based program model is based on many other male inclusion programs that focus on gender equality, harmful gender norms, and family caregiving programs,

⁹⁰ *Sustainable Development Goal number five (SDG5): Women's equality by 2030*. United Nations Development Programme. Accessed on Jan 31, 2020, at <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs/sdg-5-gender-equality>

⁹¹ *Substantive equality: progress of women in Nepal (1995-2015)*. UN Nepal. Web site accessed on July 20, 2020, at <https://un.info.np/Net/NeoDocs/View/6343>

⁹² *Nepal's 2015 Constitution, Articles 29, 38, 39—English translation* (Aug 2019). Constitute Project. Accessed on Feb 3, 2020, at https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Nepal_2015.pdf

and has been successfully tested in at least twenty-two developing countries over the past twelve years with consistent success.^{93,94,95,96,97,98,99,100}

The primary beneficiaries of this *Initiative* are Nepali women, their families, and communities, whose quality of life indicators are likely to improve. In addition to achieving 2030 SDG5 goals, the government and its citizens are likely to see improved economic conditions due to an increase in the numbers of women entrepreneurs, the resulting rise in employment, and an increase in tax revenues.

Authorization and institutional mechanisms

The Federal directive for the *Empowering Nepali Women Initiative* would be authorized by the National Council of Ministers using the institutional mechanisms of tok-adesh and Cabinet

⁹³ van der Gaag, N, Heilman, B, Gupta, T, Nembhard, C, Barker, G (2019). *State of the world's fathers: unlocking the power of men's care*. Promundo. Washington, DC. Accessed on Jan 29, 2020, at <https://promundoglobal.org/resources/state-of-the-worlds-fathers-unlocking-the-power-of-mens-care>

⁹⁴ *Boys and men as partners for advancing gender equality* (Jan 2020). Promundo, Women Deliver, Dove Men+ Care. Infographic accessed on April 2, 2020, at <https://promundoglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Women-Deliver-Male-Engagement-Infographic.pdf>

⁹⁵ *Recruitment and retention of male participants in gender-transformative programs* (Jul 23, 2020). Promundo and Plan International Canada. Brief accessed on July 23, 2020, at <https://promundoglobal.org/resources/learning-brief-recruitment-and-retention-of-male-participants-in-gender-transformative-programs>

⁹⁶ Sharma S, B, Khatri A (2018). *Factors influencing male participation in reproductive health: a qualitative study*. Journal of Multidisciplinary Healthcare, Vol 11, pp 601-608. Accessed on Mar 1, 2020, at <https://www.dovepress.com/factors-influencing-male-participation-in-reproductive-health-a-qualit-peer-reviewed-article-JMDH>

⁹⁷ Greene, ME, Mehta, M, Pulerwitz, J, Wulf, D, Bankole, A, Singh, S (Jan 2006). *Involving men in reproductive health: contributions to development*. Millennium Project. Accessed on Mar 2, 2020, at <https://www.faithtoactionnetwork.org/resources/pdf/Involving%20Men%20in%20Reproductive%20Health-Contributions%20to%20Development.pdf>

⁹⁸ *Recruitment and retention of male participants in gender-transformative programs* (Jul 23, 2020). Promundo and Plan International Canada. Brief accessed on July 23, 2020, at <https://promundoglobal.org/resources/learning-brief-recruitment-and-retention-of-male-participants-in-gender-transformative-programs>

⁹⁹ Kwasnicka, D, Dombrowski, S, White, M, Sniehotka, F (Jul 2, 2016). *Theoretical explanations for maintenance of behaviour change: a systematic review of behaviour theories*. Health Psychology Review, v10(3) pp277-296. Accessed on July 15, 2020, at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4975085>

¹⁰⁰ Marcus, R, Harper, C (Jan 14, 2014). *Gender justice and social norms—processes of change for adolescent girls: towards a conceptual framework 2*. Accessed on July 15, 2020, at <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/8831.pdf>

review. Tok-adesh is a Nepali legal process to authorize and implement directives and regulations for immediate action at any level of government. The power to do this is granted to the National Council of Ministers by Nepal's Constitution as an extension of the Prime Ministers executive authority. The Cabinet review process is required for directives or other regulations sponsored by more than one National Ministry.^{101,102,103}

Proposed directives that follow the tok-adesh process usually start with an advisory committee representing all stakeholders, who make collective recommendations to the sponsoring Ministry or Ministries. These committees do not have constitutional decision-making power, but they are often assembled when the directive involves multiple Ministries or is potentially complex or difficult.¹⁰⁴ In this case, an advisory committee was appointed and convened for the *Plan of Action* in 2019, and has already made recommendations to the Ministries.

The *Plan of Action* is likely to be reviewed in 2021, after approval from the Council of Ministers at the end of 2020 and an official posting in Nepal's *Code of Federal Regulations*, a Constitutionally required step for any proposed regulation to be included in a Cabinet-level meeting's agenda. Once listed on an official agenda, the Cabinet—which includes the National Council—will then consider the proposed directive and decide whether to approve it.¹⁰⁵ If

¹⁰¹ Dhungel, DN (2012) *A guide to government in Nepal: structures, functions, and practices*. The Asia Foundation. Himal Books, Kathmandu. Accessed on July 20, 2020, at <https://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/AGuidetoGovernmentinNepal.pdf>

¹⁰² *Constitution of Nepal*. Web site last updated September 30, 2019. Nepal Law Commission. Accessed on April 3, 2020, at <http://www.lawcommission.gov.np/en/archives/category/documents/prevailing-law/constitution/constitution-of-nepal>

¹⁰³ *A guide to government in Nepal* (2012). Asia Foundation and Enabling State Programme of the UK, p21. Accessed on July 12, 2020, at <https://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/AGuidetoGovernmentinNepal.pdf>

¹⁰⁴ *A guide to government in Nepal* (2012). Asia Foundation and Enabling State Programme of the UK, p21, Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ *A guide to government in Nepal* (2012). Asia Foundation and Enabling State Programme of the UK, p19. Accessed on July 12, 2020, at <https://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/AGuidetoGovernmentinNepal.pdf>

approved by the Cabinet, the Chief Secretary performs a legal review. Once it passes this final hurdle, the directive becomes law.¹⁰⁶

Key partners, collaborators, and allies

The *Empowering Nepali Women Initiative* will be most successful if supported by well-defined partnerships between all levels of government, community and village thought leaders, and selected NGOs and companies who work in Western Nepal. Once the new directive's parameters and processes have been drafted by the three Ministries, this proposal advocates for a six-month partnership development process to engage Provincial and Municipal leaders, CSOs, and the private sector. Several NGOs, International NGOs (INGOs) and local governments have worked on ending chhaupadi in Nepal over the past ten years or so and others have indicated support for the need to educate and integrate men into women's empowerment efforts.¹⁰⁷

The goal for NGO partnerships is to work with at least one organization per Province with expertise in gender equality and that focus on eliminating chhaupadi. Potential organizations include, for example, Care Women Nepal in conjunction with Restless Development Nepal in the Karnali Province (6), that have led an anti-chhaupadi project in several Districts there for the past four years.^{108,109,110,111} This proposal also advocates for identifying and partnering with at least five community thought leaders in each of the four

¹⁰⁶ *A guide to government in Nepal* (2012). Asia Foundation and Enabling State Programme of the UK, p21, Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Morrison, J, et al (2018), Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Care Women Nepal. Website accessed on March 3, 2020, at <https://carewomennepal.org>

¹⁰⁹ *Abolish Chhaupadi practices in mid far west provinces of Nepal*. Restless Development Nepal. Web page accessed on Feb 20, 2020, at <https://restlessdevelopment.org/abolish-chhaupadi-practices-in-mid-and-far-west-of-nepal>

¹¹⁰ *Restless Development Nepal: Program portfolio 2017/2018*. Web site accessed on Mar 30, 2020, at <https://restlessdevelopment.org/file/nepal-programme-brief-copy-pdf>

¹¹¹ Alejos, SC (Jul 2015), Ibid.

Provinces, who can serve as *Initiative* spokespersons and ambassadors to educate, engage, and motivate their local constituents and government representatives to support this effort. These local leaders can include village healers and elders, businesspersons, local NGO representatives and residents, and the like as determined by partners, and should include an equal representation of men and women who support the *Initiative's* goals.

Program development

To develop this *Initiative*, Ministry representatives and expert advisors will draft and adopt a core set of curriculum topics, including proficiency indicators and recommended implementation guidelines in the first six months. This guidance can be customized from community to community through a collaborative process with Provincial and local governments in the Western region over the following one and one-half years.

There are two strategies that can encourage men and boys to participate in the *Initiative* that should be considered during the development process:

- *Incentives*: Men, boys, and their families could be offered certain benefits for participating in and reaching interim goals for the program such as extra food rations, easier access to government loans, or small cash awards.
- *Raising awareness campaigns*: Information campaigns and events within the regions featuring *Initiative* ambassadors can encourage more community acceptance, advocacy, and participation.

Program implementation

According to a 2012 analysis by the Asia Foundation, Nepal has three basic types of government policy implementation: Law and order, programs and policies, and service delivery.¹¹² The *Empowering Nepali Women Initiative* falls under programs and policies. As planned, regional and local governments identified during the development process will work with NGOs, community groups, and local leaders to customize *Initiative* guidelines and competencies for their needs. A train-the-trainer model will be used to establish groups of District-based facilitators. Expert consultants will be subcontracted to conduct independent testing and evaluation, and to draft reports for review by *Initiative* partners before being released to the public.

Program cost

Now in its third year, the new government is stretching its scarce resources to support policies and programs that can help meet its “Prosperous Nepal, Happy Nepalis,” goal by 2030.¹¹³ This requires some creativity and the support of a consortium of donors, including civil society, the private sector, and, if appropriate, multilateral institutions.

The total estimated cost over nine years is USD \$18,000,000, with annual costs varying by year (please see **Table 2, page 25**). Program, partnership, and guidelines development expenses will be incurred in years one and two, followed by program implementation and

¹¹² Dhungel, DN (2012) *A guide to government in Nepal: structures, functions, and practices*. The Asia Foundation. Himal Books, Kathmandu, pp21-22. Accessed on July 20, 2020, at <https://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/AGuidetoGovernmentinNepal.pdf>

¹¹³ 2020 Nepal schedule IV consultation press release, staff report, and statement by the executive (Apr 6, 2020). International Monetary Fund. Accessed on July 27, 2020, at <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2020/04/06/Nepal-2019-Article-IV-Consultation-Press-Release-Staff-Report-and-Statement-by-the-Executive-49308>

monitoring costs in years three through eight, and site visits, auditing, and evaluation and reporting costs in the final year.

Empowering Nepali Women Initiative Estimated Budget (2021 - 2030) in 2020 US dollars				
Funding Source	Development (Y1-2)	Implementation (Y3-8)	Evaluation (Y9)	Total
Federal	810,000	4,428,000	216,000	6,120,000
Provincial	378,000	2,066,400	100,800	3,060,000
Municipal	27,000	147,600	7,200	360,000
NGO/INGO	675,000	3,690,000	180,000	3,060,000
Private	810,000	4,428,000	216,000	5,400,000
Total	2,700,000	14,760,000	720,000	18,000,000

Table 2

Program evaluation

Plans call for the *Initiative* be tested using effectiveness and equity measures in years three, five, and seven, with a final evaluation at the end of the program. The purpose of these tests is to determine whether the *Initiative* has reached its policy goals over time. The first three tests will track progress on reaching the goals of seventy five percent program participation by Western men and boys, the overall fifty percent reduction in the community practice of chhaupadi, and the percentage of local communities who have launched an approved version of the *Initiative*. The primary equity measures will be a national biannual poll of the Nepali people's perceptions of gender equality (supported by the Asia Foundation); polling of local attitudes and perceptions about the program and its impact in years three, five, seven, and nine; and a consensus meeting of experts that will develop an official government report at the program's conclusion.

5. POLICY ANALYSIS

The policy goal for the *Empowering Nepali Women Initiative* is to help meet Nepal's commitment to women's equality by 2030 by adopting and implementing a Federal directive to eliminate chhaupadi. The proposed directive represents a constitutional, transparent, and well-supported effort by the government to improve the status of women in Nepal. This goal complements and strengthens three other recently adopted policy goals in Nepal:

- The *Prosperous Nepal, Happy Nepalis* campaign, based on the government's policy goal of reaching middle-class country status by 2030 by "focusing on enhancing social, economic, and physical infrastructures."¹¹⁴
- Nepal's socioeconomic goal to alleviate poverty and bring down the absolute poverty level to less than five percent by 2030.¹¹⁵
- The government's commitment to reach SDG5 goals for gender equality, also by 2030.¹¹⁶

This is an ambitious effort. Fortunately, there is a good likelihood of success given the strength of support from the public and private sectors and, more importantly, the Nepali people. But success with such a short timeline from a newly formed government will depend on the Federal, Provincial, and Municipal leadership's abilities to quickly solidify working partnerships, including establishing clear divisions of responsibility. The Ministries will also need to ensure the cooperation of local CSOs and community members, and, if deemed appropriate, support from private companies and multilateral institutions with an interest in this policy.

¹¹⁴ 2020 Nepal schedule IV consultation statement by the executive (Apr 6, 2020). International Monetary Fund, p2. Accessed on July 27, 2020, at <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2020/04/06/Nepal-2019-Article-IV-Consultation-Press-Release-Staff-Report-and-Statement-by-the-Executive-49308>

¹¹⁵ 2020 Nepal schedule IV consultation press release (Apr 6, 2020). International Monetary Fund, p2, Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Sustainable Development Goal Number Five (SDG5): Women's equality by 2030 (2015). United Nations Development Program website. Accessed on Jan 31, 2020, at <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs/sdg-5-gender-equality>

The recently published *2020 Schedule IV Consultation Report* from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) bodes well for Nepal's success in reaching 2030 goals. One observation from the report is about Nepal's strong economic and societal growth, which has improved each year since 2015. The IMF found that Nepal has been bolstered by a newly stable political environment, stating that, "Recent strong growth in Nepal has been supported by greater political stability, an electricity supply that is more reliable and with broader access, and reconstruction activity following the devastating earthquakes in 2015."¹¹⁷

There is also pressure on the government to address the problem of chhaupadi from advocates and key stakeholders that should be tackled at the start. One challenge involves the backlog of laws needed to enforce the new constitution: Nepal's government is only three years old, but there are 900 laws and regulations that each government tier is required to review, revise (if necessary), and adopt. To date, only sixty laws have been passed overall, not including the anti-chhaupadi law. Since these laws cannot be enforced without being officially adopted, there is confusion among government officials and agencies about how to enforce them. The recent news about women's and children's deaths during menstrual exile has strengthened the call for these laws to be prioritized and finalized.

Costs and consequences

There are no helpful historical precedents for analyzing this policy directive due its national scale, Nepal's position in the world as a newly-formed government with aspirational goals, the unique high-concentration of chhaupadi practice in Western Nepal, and the short time frame for accomplishing these goals. There have been district and village-levels efforts to reduce or eliminate chhaupadi in Nepal over the past two decades, but none of them possessed the scope

¹¹⁷ 2020 Nepal schedule IV consultation press release (Apr 6, 2020) p2, Ibid.

and content needed for success—although there are valuable lessons learned from them that can enhance the *Initiative's* effectiveness. For example, The Asia Foundation supports local training programs for men on gender-based violence, and The Advocacy Project sponsors annual fellowships, some of which help end menstrual banishment in Western Nepal through local education and women's empowerment training.^{118,119}

There have also been sociobehavioral research and programs conducted in other developing countries over the past decade that focus on male involvement to increase women's equality and empowerment. Study results from these efforts can serve as helpful guidelines to build the *Initiative*. Many of these studies rely on carefully developed, tested goals and competencies for participants using validated evaluation instruments like the Gender Equitable Men Scale (GEMS).¹²⁰ The GEMS scale has been adapted for research by Promundo and others in twenty-two countries to assess men's perceptions, attitudes, and practices about gender equality. Please see **Table 3, page 31**, for an example of gender equality and chhaupadi competencies for community leaders and individuals, adapted from a Restless Development youth empowerment chhaupadi reduction program.¹²¹ Here are some recent examples of relevant male involvement studies:

Male engagement program (Bangladesh, Ghana, Haiti, Nigeria): The Strengthening Health

Outcomes for Women and Children (SHOW) program from Plan International and Promundo

¹¹⁸ Varughese, G, Michael, B, Sumina, K (Apr 1, 2015). *The stubborn persistence of gender inequality*. Asia Foundation. Web page accessed on Jul 15, 2020, at <https://asiafoundation.org/2015/04/01/the-stubborn-persistence-of-gender-inequality>

¹¹⁹ *Fellowship 5: End menstrual banishment in Nepal*. 2019. The Advocacy Project. Accessed on Feb 28, 2020 at <https://www.advocacynet.org/fellowship-5-caed>

¹²⁰ *International men and gender equality surveys (IMAGES)* (2008 – 2020). Promundo and International Center for Research on Women. Research series accessed on March 15, 2020, at <https://promundoglobal.org/programs/international-men-and-gender-equality-survey-images>

¹²¹ Adapted from *Accountability in action: a practical guide for young people tracking the sustainable development goals* (2018). Restless Development, New York, London. Accessed on Mar 30, 2020, at <https://restlessdevelopment.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Accountability-in-Action.pdf>

focuses on gender norms and male inclusion on maternal, newborn, and child health. The five-year program (2013 – 2018) was implemented in underserved regions in four developing countries, Bangladesh, Ghana, Haiti, and Nigeria. Outcomes data point to, “. . . positive normative behavior changes in caregiving and household labor,” among the men who participated in the program. Their recommendations for implementing future programs include the following:

- Frame the messaging and program approach to appeal to men’s aspirations for themselves as involved caregivers and partners and use a strengths-based approach by building on what men and fathers already know.
- Include participants and communities in adapting the content to make sure it is contextually relevant and that participants can relate it to their everyday lives. Engage and mobilize communities and families of participants beyond the recruitment stage so that they feel involved and invested in the program in the long-term.¹²²

Please note that this study did not measure men’s attitudes and perceptions about menstruation, so we don’t know how these results might translate into Nepal’s efforts to eliminate chhaupadi.

Men’s caregiving program in Latin America: This multi-country program was conducted by Promundo, Sonke Gender Justice, and the Institute of Development Studies, and took place in Brazil, Chile, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Uruguay. One of their key findings was that, “. . . fatherhood is a key entry point for discussions around household labor, childcare

¹²² *Engaging men in reducing maternal, newborn, and child mortality: lessons from Bangladesh, Ghana, Haiti, Nigeria, and Senegal.* Promundo and Plan International Canada. Accessed on July 23, 2020, at <https://promundoglobal.org/engaging-men-in-reducing-maternal-newborn-and-child-mortality-lessons-from-bangladesh-ghana-haiti-nigeria-and-senegal>

responsibilities, and gender-equitable relationships. It can also serve as a gateway to involve men in other domains concerning gender equality.”¹²³

Involving men to address gender inequities in Egypt, Kazakhstan, Turkey, and Ukraine: This multi-country study was sponsored by the Interagency Gender Working Group, which is a global network of gender practitioners from all areas of the world and in the donor community.¹²⁴ Among the policy recommendations based on this program’s outcomes were the following:

- Encourage and facilitate national policy dialogues and strategies targeting men’s health problems.
- Promote national dialogues on gender and masculinities with in-country stakeholders, on (1) gender equality in socioeconomic policy on the “care economy,” (2) promoting men’s engagement in childcare, and (3) better gender-balancing within educational streaming to technical and social subjects.
- Support business and trade union leaders to speak out publicly against traditional gender stereotypes about women’s and men’s roles.
- Champion positive examples of supportive male partners to highlight that appropriate work–life balance is not solely women’s responsibility.
- Support the development of campaigns to improve work–life balance, emphasizing that shared responsibilities within the family are a win-win for women and men alike.¹²⁵

¹²³ Santos, S (2015). *MenCare in Latin America: Challenging harmful masculine norms and promoting positive changes in men’s caregiving*. EMERGE Case Study 5, Promundo-US, Sonke Gender Justice and the Institute of Development Studies, Brighton. Accessed on Jan 29, 2020, at <https://promundoglobal.org/resources/mencare-in-latin-america-emerge-case-study>

¹²⁴ Interagency Gender Working Group (IGWG). Web site accessed on July 15, 2020, at <https://www.igwg.org>

¹²⁵ Interagency Gender Working Group. 2013. *Involving Men to Address Gender Inequities: Three Case Studies*. Washington, DC, Population Reference Bureau. Accessed on Jul 15, 2020, at <https://www.igwg.org/resources/three-case-studies-involving-men-to-address-gender-inequities>

One note of caution: this study took place in North Africa, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia, so regional and cultural differences will need to be factored in for any similar program in Nepal.

<p>Sample community-based goals and competencies for gender equality and chhaupadi elimination programs in Nepal*</p>
<p>Community leaders increase their support and implementation of actions to eliminate chhaupadi and other forms of discrimination during menstruation by the end of the program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Community members have increased their knowledge and awareness of menstrual hygiene, sexual and reproductive rights, and health (SRHR), and different forms of menstrual discrimination, including chhaupadi and its consequences. <p>Community members and leaders have improved skills to take actions to eliminate chhaupadi and menstrual discrimination.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Men, women, girls, and boys are more empowered to advocate against chhaupadi with community leaders by the end of the project. – Men, women, girls, and boys have increased knowledge on menstrual hygiene and SRHR, and have improved knowledge on chhaupadi and other forms of menstrual discrimination and its consequences. – Local leaders have strengthened their skills to engage with local decision makers to take actions against Chhaupadi. <p>District level CSOs have greater capacity to respond to chhaupadi and other forms of menstrual discrimination by the end of the program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – CSOs have increased skills to work on chhaupadi and other forms of gender-based violence. – CSOs have increased capacity to advocate for the elimination of chhaupadi and other forms of menstrual discrimination by the end of the program. <p>National government and local government in project areas take actions to abolish chhaupadi practices by the end of the program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Central and District government officials and decision makers have increased their knowledge of the consequences of chhaupadi and other forms of menstrual discrimination, and required actions to eliminate this practice by the end of the program. – Alliance between CSOs at National level is strengthened to coordinate and implement advocacy actions on chhaupadi and other forms of menstrual discriminations by the end of the program. <p><small>*Adapted from <i>Accountability in action: a practical guide for young people tracking the sustainable development goals</i> (2018). Restless Development, New York, London. Accessed on Mar 30, 2020, at https://restlessdevelopment.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Accountability-in-Action.pdf</small></p>
<p>Table 3</p>

Future benefits: There are likely to be future benefits from this *Initiative* tied to expected increases in women’s equality and empowerment, including the following:

- *Women’s employment:* As women share a larger percentage of Nepal’s workforce, it follows that overall employment levels would increase, resulting in more tax revenue for the state. It could also lead to a decrease in the number of Nepali people living below the five percent poverty level.
- *Benefits of family planning:* Family planning is a proven strategy for reducing maternal mortality and morbidity rates, one of Nepal’s primary health goals. It also helps increase women’s empowerment and equality, one of the SDG5 goals.¹²⁶
- *World-standing:* An increase in world standing can create stronger incentives for investment in Nepal with better credit ratings and lower multilateral institution loan rates, a larger and more productive economy, and the resulting increase in quality of life measures on home and food security, education, health, and levels of happiness.¹²⁷
- *New partnership model:* This new model can inform other intergovernmental communications efforts during a time when more efficient and effective policy partnerships are needed.

Tangible and intangible costs: Most government policies are associated with a variety of tangible and intangible costs that could negatively impact Nepalis or some Nepali communities. Tangible costs to watch for include increased childcare expenses for women who are working, government costs and subsidies for needed improvements in educational institutions—including infrastructure and quality improvements to gain and retain accreditation to attract international students, and roads and transportation improvements to increase access to schools and remote

¹²⁶ Barot, S (first published on-line Aug 1, 2017). *The benefits of investing in international family planning and the price of slashing funding*. Guttmacher Institute. Accessed June 20, 2020, at <https://www.guttmacher.org/gpr/2017/08/benefits-investing-international-family-planning-and-price-slashing-funding>

¹²⁷ *2019 investment climate statements: Nepal* (2019). US Department of State. Accessed on Aug 8, 2020, at <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-investment-climate-statements/nepal>

communities. Intangible costs will likely include the discomfort felt by some in the Hindu religious community who support chhaupadi and patriarchy or are worried about what happens to them in a newly secular Nepal, and the fear some Nepalis will have about losing their unique sense of culture and history.

Intended and unintended consequences: Based on outcomes associated with other large-scale social change programs, there will be intended and unintended consequences for a policy directive like this one. These factors can be hard to predict, but some can be addressed before and during *Initiative* implementation. Many intended consequences can help lead to the program's success over time, most of them impacting Nepali women. Some of these include increases in women's education levels, employment, representation in government, and business entrepreneurship. There will also be unintended consequences to consider that may include abandonment of small villages as household incomes and education levels increase and environmental issues cause displacement, a rise in demand for power and other utilities as more Nepalis reach middle-class status, and the cost of relocating and retraining Nepalis who can no longer rely on farming, mining, or similar practices.

Financial feasibility: This proposal offers the least expensive approach to boosting Nepal's chances of reaching its economic and women's equality goals in nine years. One way to ameliorate the financial burden is through shared support with NGOs, INGOs, CSOs, corporations, and, if appropriate, multilateral institutions. To do so would require special exemptions for outside supporters. This is due to the government's adoption of restrictions for nonprofits and CSOs in the name of national sovereignty and privacy protection. According to the new *National Integrity Policy*, drafted under the direction of the Prime Minister in 2018 and pending adoption, INGOs may not operate alone in Nepal, can only work to support CSOs, may

not employ foreign nationals (with exceptions), and are required to register and be reviewed annually by the Ministry of Trade.^{128,129,130} This draft policy could make obtaining financial support from these organizations challenging. One strategy to simplify the process would be for the Ministries to grant blanket or partial exceptions for outside funders when writing the directive. Other ways that keep this *Initiative* financially feasible are its heavy reliance on volunteerism, the savings in program development costs since similar programs already exist and can be adapted, and shared costs by multiple Ministries and other government agencies.

Technical and administrative feasibility: Nepal's Federal government has the technical and administrative capacities to create and adopt the proposed directive, including managing the official review and approval processes and initiating partnerships with Provincial and local governments, NGOs, community groups, and donors. Once approved, the Ministries' roles will shift to legal review, monitoring, and advisory responsibilities. The other partners will implement and evaluate the *Initiative*. Each Western Province and District will have unique needs, guided by their local community members and leaders, with implementation assistance and support from local, national, and international NGOs, CSOs, and other donors.

Impact measures: This proposal assumes using several tests to determine whether the *Initiative* has reached its goals. The first is the annual survey of the Nepali people, conducted by the Asia Foundation.¹³¹ Relevant topline results their 2018 survey of attitudes and perceptions about gender roles and women's equality are featured in **Table 4, page 35**. Other measures, detailed

¹²⁸ Pending NGO Legislative/Regulatory Initiatives (Apr 16, 2020). International Center for Nonprofit Law. Accessed on July 3, 2020, at <https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/nepal>

¹²⁹ National Integrity Policy (in Nepali), Accessed on July 3, 2020, at <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/4501069/National-Integrity-Policy.pdf>

¹³⁰ OPMCM drafts national integrity policy (Apr 26, 2018). Himalayan Times. Accessed on July 3, 2020, at <https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/opmcm-drafts-national-integrity-policy>

¹³¹ A Survey of the Nepali People, Asia Foundation, 2018, *ibid*.

in the *Policy Proposal* section on **page 19**, include tracking progress on reaching the goals of seventy five percent program participation by Western men and boys, the overall fifty percent reduction in the community practice of chhaupadi, and the percentage of targeted local communities who have launched an approved version of the *Initiative*.

Views on the Gender Roles and Gender Equality, by Year					
		Strongly agree %	Somewhat agree %	Somewhat disagree %	Strongly disagree %
It is more important for a family to have a son than a daughter	SNP 2017	2.8	11.5	36.5	49.2
	SNP 2018	2.9	9.6	34.8	52.7
A higher education is more important for a boy than for a girl	SNP 2017	1.9	8.3	38.7	51.0
	SNP 2018	1.9	6.5	35.9	55.7
Women should be encouraged to work outside the home	SNP 2017	56.1	33.4	6.8	3.5
	SNP 2018	45.2	44.2	6.9	3.4
It is not suitable for women to engage in politics	SNP 2017	9.1	10.4	31.7	48.2
	SNP 2018	7.1	13.3	40.9	38.2
Women should have no control over her income, movement and decisions	SNP 2017	-	-	-	-
	SNP 2018	15.5	34.1	31.1	18.5
A woman has the right to decide how many children she should bear.	SNP 2017	-	-	-	-
	SNP 2018	18.8	41.0	25.6	13.9
It is okay for a wife to seek community mediation if she has problems in the house.	SNP 2017	-	-	-	-
	SNP 2018	18.7	44.1	23.7	12.6
If a wife does not obey her husband, he has the right to punish her.	SNP 2017	-	-	-	-
	SNP 2018	5.7	22.6	35.9	35.2
To be a man, you need to be tough.	SNP 2017	-	-	-	-
	SNP 2018	33.0	41.7	14.9	9.5
The participation of the father is important in raising children.	SNP 2017	-	-	-	-
	SNP 2018	24.6	48.5	15.2	11.4
When job opportunities are limited, men should have more right to a job.	SNP 2017	-	-	-	-
	SNP 2018	5.4	19.8	39.0	34.3
It is a man's responsibility to fulfil financial needs for his family.	SNP 2017	-	-	-	-
	SNP 2018	18.8	34.3	28.1	18.5

**A Survey of the Nepali People, Asia Foundation, 2018*

Table 4

Professional and

ethical concerns:

There are two professional and ethical concerns to consider:

Religious freedom: For this effort to succeed, devout Hindus—especially men in the Western Provinces—will need to understand and advocate for the goals of the *Initiative*. They

are more likely to adapt their behavior and will better respond to individual and group interventions that respect their beliefs.

Government corruption: The 2020 IMF Schedule IV report noted concerns about government corruption stating that, “Corruption is a significant problem,” and that, “Efforts are needed to

strengthen institutions and reduce corruption.”^{132,133} Until this perception can be corrected with an effective corruption reduction plan, multilateral banks and other economic agencies are less likely to provide loans and direct support to Nepal, which will make it challenging to reach its goal of middle-class country status by 2030.

6. POLITICAL ANALYSIS

Nepal’s new government has one advantage over other countries that live under more established, older regimes: Its relative youth keeps it mostly free from fighting long-standing, polarized political battles on issues like gender equality, climate change, and access to public education. Most policymakers—and the Nepali people—agree about these issues.¹³⁴ The elimination of chhaupadi is a politically popular goal in Nepal, supported at the highest levels of government. Women’s equality and empowerment are built into the new Constitution and some of the government’s top policy goals are supported by its commitment to modernizing Nepal’s social and physical infrastructure. The policy process to adopt a directive for the *Empowering Nepali Women Initiative* is relatively straight-forward with few potential barriers (please see ***Authorization and institutional mechanisms***, pages 20 – 22, for a description of the process).

There are three politically sensitive issues to consider for this directive. First, special attention needs to be paid to devout Hindus in certain Western Nepal Districts who hold more

¹³² 2020 Nepal schedule IV consultation staff report (Apr 6, 2020). International Monetary Fund, p17. Accessed on July 27, 2020, at <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2020/04/06/Nepal-2019-Article-IV-Consultation-Press-Release-Staff-Report-and-Statement-by-the-Executive-49308>

¹³³ 2020 Nepal schedule IV consultation staff report (Apr 6, 2020). International Monetary Fund, p43. Accessed on July 27, 2020, at <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2020/04/06/Nepal-2019-Article-IV-Consultation-Press-Release-Staff-Report-and-Statement-by-the-Executive-49308>

¹³⁴ *A survey of the Nepali people 2018* (May 8, 2019). Asia Foundation, Interdisciplinary Analysts, Kathmandu University School of Arts, Lilitpur (Rev. Aug 13, 2019), p57. Web page accessed on Jul 25, 2020, at <https://asiafoundation.org/publication/a-survey-of-the-nepali-people-2018>

traditional beliefs than the rest of the country and who are likely to resist changing their beliefs about menstrual exile. Many of these citizens—primarily remote villagers—live in areas where poverty is common, and most are from lower castes which have had, as a rule, less access to power and political standing than higher-level castes. Given the patriarchal practices that are more common in the West than the rest of the country, many family members participate in supporting chhaupadi. Men are the primary decision-makers in most Western families and communities, but many women fear eliminating chhaupadi due to religious concerns and respect for tradition.¹³⁵

A second but related area of sensitivity is in the need to treat community elders in the West—regardless of gender but, again, mostly men—with respect and individual attention when developing local political support, while simultaneously engaging the younger generation. Morrison et al, authors of a 2018 study of menstrual practices in the Western Provinces, reported that older generations of Hindus in village households held the strongest traditional pro-chhaupadi beliefs, and that village leaders reinforce those beliefs to maintain social status in their communities. The authors recommended that chhaupadi reduction programs in Nepal should consider, “. . .the importance of engaging the wider community and girls in designing and enacting strategies to address harmful practices.”¹³⁶

The third area of sensitivity concerns the gap between Nepal’s highly supportive gender equality laws and the cultural norms of its people. According to the 2018 Asia Foundation survey of the Nepali people, “. . .quite a large proportion of Nepalis believe in an egalitarian society for

¹³⁵ Alejos, SC (July 2015), Ibid.

¹³⁶ Morrison, J, et al, (2018), Ibid.

men and women, [but] strong roots of the gender stereotypes still exist in our society.”¹³⁷ In economic terms, this is comparable to creating a more enabling environment for its people to embrace gender equality through women’s empowerment, and—in a step unique to Nepal—by eliminating chhaupadi. Nepal appears to be in a better position than most to address this variance given the new government’s sensitivities to its peoples’ social and economic needs as expressed in its Constitution.

Given the strong support from most sectors for eliminating chhaupadi in Nepal and the sensitivities just noted, a key political strategy is to invest in and encourage strong partnerships among key stakeholders, local leaders, and community constituents. To succeed, the *Initiative* needs to be driven by committed advocates at the village and District levels. There are several NGOs and multilateral institutions that have analyzed Nepal’s chhaupadi issues and made programmatic recommendations with political implications. For example, the UN Office of Human Rights made several suggestions nine years ago to help eliminate chhaupadi in Nepal. These ideas, if incorporated into the *Initiative*’s development and implementation plan, can help build a committed team of advocates:

- Raise awareness among men and women at community level, and target traditional healers, mothers-in-law, priests, adolescents, and vulnerable groups.
- Conduct advocacy campaigns against chhaupadi, including posters, booklets, and radio campaigns in local languages.
- Increase joint programming on chhaupadi through, for example, forming district level committees and develop coordination mechanisms among agencies working on chhaupadi.

¹³⁷ *A survey of the Nepali people 2018* (May 8, 2019). Asia Foundation, Interdisciplinary Analysts, Kathmandu University School of Arts, Lilitpur (Rev. Aug 13, 2019), pp56-57. Web page accessed on Jul 25, 2020, at <https://asiafoundation.org/publication/a-survey-of-the-nepali-people-2018>

- Allocate funds to enhance awareness on chhaupadi and encourage local officials to declare chhaupadi free areas.¹³⁸

Morrison et al found that Western villagers maintain their social status by supporting chhaupadi. To address this motivating factor, the researchers recommended engaging entire village communities in any effort to reduce chhaupadi, but in a way that helps convey positive social status to supporting the elimination of menstrual exile. Restless Development Nepal, a nonprofit organization, has worked in Far-Western Nepal to reduce chhaupadi over the past decade. They recommend raising awareness and support, “. . .from the community leaders, especially traditional healers, to empower young people, and to strengthen local organizations and government to take action against Chhaupadi.”¹³⁹

This *Initiative* represents a chance for the new government to politically engage Nepalis with fairness and a spirit of egalitarianism, helping them embrace Nepal’s move away from the caste system toward equality, and treating them as equals in the new secular—but religiously tolerant—government. Another benefit of this approach is its potential to reduce Nepal’s poverty level, one of the government’s 2030 goals.¹⁴⁰

Stakeholders

- *Agencies:* The Federal government is the primary stakeholder, with the three sponsoring Ministries taking the lead. Their primary partners are Provincial and Municipal governments, who are the directive’s implementers. The government’s influence can

¹³⁸ *Field Bulletin: Chhaupadi in the far west* (Apr 2011). United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator’s Office, Ibid.

¹³⁹ Morrison, J, et al, (2018), Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ *2020 Nepal schedule IV consultation statement by the executive* (Apr 6, 2020). International Monetary Fund, p2. Accessed on July 27, 2020, at <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2020/04/06/Nepal-2019-Article-IV-Consultation-Press-Release-Staff-Report-and-Statement-by-the-Executive-49308>

help encourage politically useful partnerships, with a cautionary note to use care and respect when appealing to other important stakeholders and *Initiative* partners, including CSOs and local community organizations.

- *Individuals*: The key individual stakeholders for this *Initiative* have consistently supported women’s empowerment issues and the elimination of chhaupadi in Nepal. For example, Hon. [President Bidhya Devi Bhandari](#) has advocated for gender equality and women’s rights for her entire professional career, and is credited with ensuring that the new Constitution included clear metrics for women’s participation in government. Other key individuals are listed on **pages 14 – 16**.
- *Nepalis*: Most Nepali people support the new government’s efforts to modernize the country, which includes efforts to promote gender equality, but the level of support varies somewhat by Province, gender, age, and other factors.¹⁴¹ Overall results from in 2018 showed that eighty percent of Nepali people disagreed with the statement, “It is not suitable for women to engage in politics,” seventy four percent agreed that “The participation of the father is important in raising children,” and ninety percent agreed that “Women should be encouraged to work outside the home.”¹⁴² This support was validated by their widespread support for the 2017 Constitutional referendum, and will continue to be measured by the Asia Foundation’s annual survey of the Nepali people. Other touchstones are results from sociobehavioral research studies being conducted in

¹⁴¹ *A survey of the Nepali people 2018* (May 8, 2019). Asia Foundation, Interdisciplinary Analysts, Kathmandu University School of Arts, Lilitpur (Rev. Aug 13, 2019), p57. Web page accessed on Jul 25, 2020, at <https://asiafoundation.org/publication/a-survey-of-the-nepali-people-2018>

¹⁴² *A survey of the Nepali people 2018* (May 8, 2019), Ibid.

Western Nepal, consensus meetings of experts and advisory groups at regular intervals, and qualitative feedback through program evaluations

Political trade-offs

One political trade-off for initiating and implementing this directive is accepting an interim level of opposition from devout rural religious populations in exchange for the longer-term benefits from increased political and economic standing in the world. Another more challenging political trade-off is maintaining transparency with the public while also making exceptions for nonprofits and multilateral institutions who provide needed support for the *Initiative*. The government will need a credible public rationale for maintaining legal barriers and regular oversight for other, similar organizations who wish to work in Nepal on projects other than the *Initiative*.

7. RECOMMENDATION

For the reasons discussed in this memo, I recommend that the Ministries of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens; Home Affairs; and Education, Science, and Technology work together the rest of 2020 to add the *Empowering Nepali Women Initiative* to Nepal's a *National plan of action to eliminate chhaupadi by 2030*, and to adopt a legal directive to support the nine-year *Initiative* in 2021.

There are a few cons to this proposal that will be important to manage, including identifying funding pathways for increased healthcare and childcare expenses for women who are working, school upgrades, and roads and other infrastructure improvements. It will also be important to develop a clear strategy to work closely with the Hindu religious community who support chhaupadi and patriarchy, or are worried about the recent change in government (please see **pages 36 – 37**).

The policy benefits outlined in this proposal outweigh potential negative consequences, and political conditions are ripe for moving forward. This is a potentially effective part of an overall strategy for empowering women and eliminating chhaupadi by 2030. Nepal’s current efforts on this front include educating women and girls in some rural communities, offering incentives such as food vouchers to families who destroy their huts, and arresting violators of the anti-chhaupadi law. Helping men become full partners in women’s equality is a logical next step that has had promising results in at least twenty-two other countries—and could help strengthen Nepal’s other gender equality initiatives.^{143,144,145}

Men are still the primary decision-makers in most Nepali households. But a 2018 study of Nepali men concludes that, “Men are not actively engaged in most maternal and child health (MCH) services nor in other reproductive health programs.”¹⁴⁶ These data show that many men have been resistant to changing their behavior thus far—especially in the West—and are effectively blocking efforts to institute women’s empowerment practices. This *Initiative* is an effective strategy to help men become gender equality advocates and full partners in caregiving at home, opening a new and helpful contingent of supporters and local influencers.

Involving men and boys to increase gender equality and reduce harmful practices in other countries has had many positive benefits. Results from a series of male involvement programs in developing countries conducted by Promundo over the past decade show that men’s involvement in daily care work improves women’s health and, “. . . leads to better

¹⁴³ van der Gaag et al (2019), Ibid

¹⁴⁴ *Involving Men to Address Gender Inequities: Three Case Studies* (2003). Interagency Gender Working Group, Population Reference Bureau. Washington, DC. Accessed on Mar 3, 2020, at <https://www.igwg.org/resources/three-case-studies-involving-men-to-address-gender-inequities>

¹⁴⁵ *Men and boys must speak out, take action to end gender-based violence, delegates tell commission on status of women* (Mar 11, 2013). United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. Accessed on Feb 12, 2020, at <https://www.un.org/press/en/2013/wom1949.doc.htm>

¹⁴⁶ Sharma S, Khatri A (2018), Ibid.

relationships within couples that can be linked with a reduction in rates of men's violence against women," and is good for children, too. Male involvement also benefits men, with improvements in their physical, mental, and sexual health.¹⁴⁷

Cost-benefit analysis

I also recommend supporting a full analysis to determine the costs and benefits of ending the practice of chhaupadi in Nepal. This analysis could bring financial and societal costs into focus, reduce budgets even further, and point to potential new *Initiative* strategies for the government to effectively stop menstrual exile in Nepal. The government is just a little more than a decade old and has not had the financial or human resources to conduct needed cost-benefit studies to date. It has, however, sponsored studies on the prevalence, cultural impact, and sociobehavioral aspects of chhaupadi for the past decade, in partnership with INGOs, NGOs, and other agencies and community groups. The funds to conduct the cost-benefit analysis are included in year one of the budget proposal (please see **page 25**).

9. CONCLUSION

Chhaupadi is a vestige of old Nepal. It is now illegal, opposed by the majority of Nepalis, condemned by state and international rights organizations, and is a barrier to achieving this country's important goals of gender equality, improved human rights, increased employment levels, and new status as a middle-class nation in just nine years. This moment presents a unique opportunity for Nepal to expand its efforts to end chhaupadi in Nepal and attain women's

¹⁴⁷ van der Gaag et al (2019), Ibid.

equality by 2030. The *Empowering Nepali Women Initiative* is an innovative, evidence-based, and cost-effective strategy to help reach that goal.^{148,149}

This *Initiative* focuses on men and boys as change agents, a successful strategy in twenty-two other developing countries. In 2018, Morrison et al discussed the need to address, “. . . unacceptable social norms which dictate that women and girls’ bodies are the property of men – something to be abused and controlled.”¹⁵⁰ UN Nepal declared in 2011 that, “The practice of *Chhaupadi* requires urgent public health attention.”¹⁵¹ Both statements are still true, especially in Western Nepal, and this *Initiative* is an effective way to give the problem of menstrual exile the attention it deserves.

¹⁴⁸ Singh, P (Jan 20, 2020). *No respite for women as ‘chhaupadi’ continues in tents*. Himalayan. Accessed on Mar 1, 2020, at <https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/no-respite-for-women-as-chhaupadi-continues-in-tents>

¹⁴⁹ Logan, M (Jan 23, 2020). *Tipping point on menstrual banishment in Nepal*. Inter Press Service. Accessed on Mar 3, 2020, at <http://www.ipsnews.net/2020/01/tipping-point-menstrual-banishment-nepal>

¹⁵⁰ Morrison et al, *ibid*.

¹⁵¹ UN Nepal Field Bulletin, *ibid*.

Curriculum Vitae: Wayne C. Shields

EXPERIENCE

Development and Outreach Consultant, Promundo (2018 – present)

President and CEO, Association of Reproductive Health Professionals (1998 – 2017)

Vice President, Association of Reproductive Health Professionals (1993 – 1998)

Director of Education, Association of Reproductive Health Professionals (1991 – 1993)

Education Manager, The George Washington University (1988 – 1991)

EDUCATION

Master of Arts, Johns Hopkins University (2020)

Public Management (health policy concentration)

Master's Certificate, Johns Hopkins University (2020)

Nonprofit Management

Post-Graduate Courses, The George Washington University (1990-1992)

Organizational Behavior

Bachelor of Arts, Old Dominion University (1983)

English Literature, Women's Studies

GOVERNING BOARDS

Board of directors, executive committee, development committee chair,

Promundo (2014 - present)

Section chair, executive committee, conference planning committee chair

*American Public Health Association, Sexual and Reproductive Health Section
(2011 – 2019)*

Board of directors, executive committee (officio)

Association of Reproductive Health Professionals (1998 – 2017)

Board of directors, executive committee, treasurer

Healthy Teen Network (1999 – 2004)

EDITORIAL BOARDS

Editorial board, *Contraceptive Technology Update* (1998 – 2017)
Editorial board, *Clinical Proceedings in Reproductive Health* (1991 – 2000)
Contributor, *Contraception: an international reproductive health journal* (1998 – 2017)
Contributor, *European Journal of Contraception and Reproductive Health* (2005 – 2017)
Editor, *US Women's Health Care*. Touch Briefings, UK, (Spring 2005)
Editor, *US Women's Health Care*. Touch Briefings, UK, (Spring 2004)

ADVISORY BOARDS

American Society for Emergency Contraception (2001 – 2017)
Initiative for Multipurpose Prevention Technologies (2009 – 2017)
International Consortium for Emergency Contraception (2002 – 2017)
Lelo Sexual Pleasure Products (2009 – 2015)
National Cervical Cancer Coalition (2002 – 2010)
Planned Parenthood National Medical Committee (1998 – 2017)

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS (1991 – Present)

American College of Nurse Midwives
American Academy for Sexuality Education, Counseling, and Training
American Civil Liberties Union
American Public Health Association
American Sexual Health Association
American Society for Reproductive Medicine
Association of Physician Assistants in Obstetrics and Gynecology
Association of Reproductive Health Professionals
Association of Women's Health, Obstetric, and Neonatal Nurses
Black Women's Health Imperative
European Society for Contraception and Reproductive Health
Feminist Majority Foundation
GLAAD
Healthy Teen Network
Human Rights Campaign
International Partnership for Microbicides
International Society for the Study of Women's Sexual Health
NARAL Prochoice America
National Abortion Federation
National Alliance for Hispanic Health
National Asian Women's Health Organization
National Association of Community Health Centers
National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Reproductive Health
National Black Nurses Association
National Council of Women's Organizations

National Family Planning and Reproductive Health Association
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
National Organization for Women
National Rural Health Association
North American Menopause Society
Physicians for Reproductive Health
Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine
Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality
Women's Information Network

PROFESSIONAL COALITIONS (1998 – Present)

Coalition Advancing Multipurpose Innovations, Public Health Institute
Coalition to Pass Health Care Reform
Collaborative on Health and the Environment
Family Planning Coalition
Friends of NICCHD
Friends of HRSA
National Cervical Cancer Coalition
National Coalition for LGBTQ Health
National Coalition for Sexual Health
National Sex Education Coalition
National Women's Health Research Coalition
Pro-Choice Coalition
Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition

PUBLICATIONS

- *Partisan identity, gender, and American political beliefs on gender equality*. Medium, July 18, 2020. Accessed at <https://medium.com/@waynecshields/partisan-identity-gender-and-american-political-beliefs-on-gender-equality-4f0be009c6f9>
- *So, you want to be a male ally for gender equality? (and you should): results from a national survey, and a few things you should know*. Washington, DC: Promundo, 2019. <https://promundoglobal.org/resources/male-allyship>

- *Ensuring successful development and introduction of multipurpose prevention technologies through an innovative partnership approach*. British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Special Issue: Multipurpose Prevention Technologies: Maximising Positive Synergies. v121, suppl s5, pp3-8, Oct 2014. <https://obgyn.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1471-0528.12911>
- *ARHP and SFP salute Dr. Daniel R. Mishell, Jr., and his editorial staff*. Contraception: an international reproductive health journal, v86, pp 91-92, Sep 2012.
- *Bringing it home: Our Imperative to Translate Reproductive Health Research into Real Practice Change*. Contraception: An International Reproductive Health Journal, v84, pp 1-3, Jul 2011. [https://www.contraceptionjournal.org/article/S0010-7824\(11\)00155-7/fulltext](https://www.contraceptionjournal.org/article/S0010-7824(11)00155-7/fulltext)
- *International Reproductive Health Still Worth the Investment*. Contraception: an international reproductive health journal, v83, pp 491-494, Jun 2011.
- *Bringing Research to Life: A Collaborative Partnership Dedicated to Improving Reproductive Health Care*. Contraception: an international reproductive health journal, v81, pp 267-269, Apr 2010
- *A Fast Track Solution for Reducing Unintended Pregnancies in the US: Increase Federal Support for Life-Long Provider Education and Training in Reproductive Health*. Contraception: an international reproductive health journal, v80, pp 231-233, Sept 2009.
- *The Potential of Long-Acting Reversible Contraception to Decrease Unintended Pregnancy*. Contraception: an international reproductive health journal, v78, pp 197-200, Sep 2008.
- *The Lost Years: The Challenging of Delivering Reproductive Health Care to Young Adults*. Contraception: an international reproductive health journal, v78, pp 1-3, Jul 2008.
- *Abortion and the Slippery Slope: The POPLINE controversy, language, and scientific integrity*. Science Progress, Spring 2008, pp 65-67.
- *Leadership and Diversity: A Call for New Directions in Reproductive Health Education and Practice*. Contraception: an international reproductive health journal, v75, pp 163-165, Mar 2007.
- *Ten Priorities for Women's Health*. Contraception: an international reproductive health journal, v74, pp 435-438, Dec 2006.
- *Adding Value to Reproductive Health Research: Communicating About the Moral Dimensions of Science*. Contraception: an international reproductive health journal, v74, pp 199-200, Sep 2006.
- *Morality and the Abortion Provider*. Contraception: an international reproductive health journal, v74, pp 1-2, Jul 2006.
- *Improving Contraceptive Technology: Is It A Zero-Sum Game?* Contraception: an international reproductive health journal, v72, pp 321-322, Nov 2005.
- *How Do We Ensure 'High Quality' Clinical Research?* Contraception: an international reproductive health journal, v72, pp 83-84, Aug 2005.
- *Family Planning for Obese Women: Challenges and Opportunities*. Contraception: an international reproductive health journal, v72, pp 1-4, Jul 2005.
- *Healthy Sexuality*. Contraception: An International Reproductive Health Journal, v71, pp 399-401, Jun 2005.

- *Religion and Medicine*. Contraception: an international reproductive health journal, v71, pp 302-303, Apr 2005.
- *The Expanding Role of Genetics in Contraception and Women's Health*. Contraception: an international reproductive health journal, v71, pp 81-83, Feb 2005.
- *In the New Year, A New Beginning to End HIV/AIDS*. Contraception: an international reproductive health journal, v70, pp 435-436-200, Dec 2004.
- *Universal Insurance Coverage for Contraceptives: A Public Health Imperative*, Contraception: An International Reproductive Health Journal, v70, pp 357-358, Nov 2004.
- *A Prescription for Real Security*. Contraception: An International Reproductive Health Journal, v70, pp 179-181, Sep 2004.
- *The 2005 United States Budget: Wasteful Expenditures, Foregone Opportunities*. Contraception: an international reproductive health journal, v70, pp 87-88, Aug 2004.
- *Cairo Goals for Reproductive Health: Where Do We Stand After Ten Years?* Contraception: an international reproductive health journal, v70, pp 1-2, Jul 2004.
- *The Federal Abortion Ban: A Clinical and Moral Dilemma, and an International Policy Setback*. Contraception: an international reproductive health journal, v69, pp 433-435, Jun 2004.
- *Family Planning Care: More Than Contraception*. Contraception: an international reproductive health journal, v69, pp 261-262, Apr 2004.
- *Presenting Health Risks Honestly: Mifepristone, a Case in Point*. Contraception: an international reproductive health journal, v69, pp 177-178, Mar 2004.
- *Making Research Matter*. Contraception: an international reproductive health journal, v69, p 87, Feb 2004.
- *A New Year's Resolution for Reproductive Health Care*, Contraception: an international reproductive health journal, v69, pp 1-2, Jan 2004.
- *Keeping Abortion Legal: A Look Beyond Roe v. Wade*. Contraception: an international reproductive health journal, v68, pp 307-308, Nov 2003.
- *Why We Should 'Just Say No' to Exclusive 'Abstinence-Only' Funding*. Contraception: an international reproductive health journal, v68, pp 231-232, Oct 2003.
- *The War on Words: Sensible Compromise or Slow Suicide?* Contraception: an international reproductive health journal, v68, pp 157-158, Sep 2003.
- *Reproductive Health Care: An Essential Foundation for Prosperity and Peace*. Contraception: An International Reproductive Health Journal, v68, p 73, Aug 2003.
- *Title X: A Surefire Investment With At Least A 300% Return*. Contraception: an international reproductive health journal, v68, p 1, Jul 2003.
- *Supporting Emergency Contraception Over-the-Counter*. Contraception: an international reproductive health journal, v67, p 341, May 2003.
- *Preserving Core Values in Science*. Contraception: an international reproductive health journal, v67, pp 251, Apr 2003